MN 2 — Sabbasava Sutta: Discourse on All Āsavas

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Text

14. Thus have I heard:

Once the Bhagāva[1] was staying at the Jetavana monastery of Anāthapiṇḍika in Sāvatthi. At that time the Bhagāva addressed the bhikkhus, saying: "Bhikkhus!" And they answered him: "Venerable Sir!" Then the Bhagāva uttered these words:

"Bhikkhus! I shall expound to you a discourse on the restraint of all āsavas. [2] Listen well and pay good attention. I shall speak."

"Very well, Venerable Sir!" replied the bhikkhus to the Bhagāva, who [then] delivered this discourse.

15. "Bhikkhus, I declare [that there is] the extinction of āsavas in one who knows and sees,[3] and not in one who does not know and see. Bhikkhus! What is known and what is seen by one in whom I declare [that there is] the extinction of āsavas? The right perception of phenomena[4] and the wrong perception of phenomena. Bhikkhus! In one who has

wrong perception of phenomena there arise āsavas that have not yet arisen, and there also is an increase of āsavas that have already arisen. Bhikkhus, in one who has right perception of phenomena there is no arising of āsavas that have not yet arisen, and āsavas that have already arisen are also removed.

16. "Bhikkhus! There are āsavas that should be removed through vision,[5] āsavas that should be removed through restraint, āsavas that should be removed through proper use [of requisites], āsavas that should be removed through forbearance, āsavas that should be removed through avoidance, āsavas that should be removed through rejection and āsavas that should be removed through cultivation [of the Factors of Enlightenment].

Āsavas that should be removed through vision

17. "Bhikkhus! What are the āsavas that should be removed through vision?

"Bhikkhus! In the world the ignorant worldling,[6] who is not in the habit of seeing[7] the Ariyas,[8] who is not proficient in the dhamma of the Ariyas and who is not trained and disciplined[9] in the dhamma of the Ariyas, who is not in the habit of seeing the Virtuous,[10] who is not proficient in the dhamma of the Virtuous and who is not trained and disciplined in the dhamma of the Virtuous, does not know the factors[11] which should be considered attentively and the factors which should not be considered attentively. Not discriminating the factors which should be considered attentively from the factors which should not be considered attentively, he considers attentively the factors which should not be considered and does not consider attentively the factors which should be considered.

"What are the factors which are considered attentively though they should not be considered?

"Bhikkhus! In one who considers attentively certain factors [which should not be considered], there arises the defilement of sense-pleasure[12] that has not yet arisen, and there also is an increase of the defilement of sense-pleasure that has already arisen; there arises the defilement of hankering after better existence[13] that has not yet arisen, and there also is an increase of the defilement of hankering after better existence that has already arisen; there arises the defilement of ignorance[14] that has not yet arisen, and there also is an increase of the defilement of ignorance that has already arisen. These are the factors which are considered attentively [by an ignorant worldling] though they should not be considered.

"What are the factors which are not considered attentively though they should be considered?

"Bhikkhus! In one who considers attentively certain factors [which should be considered], there does not arise the defilement of sense-pleasure that has not yet arisen, and the defilement of sense-pleasure also that has already arisen is removed; there does not arise the defilement of hankering after better existence that has not yet arisen, and the defilement of hankering after better existence also that has already arisen is removed;

there does not arise the defilement of ignorance that has not yet arisen, and the defilement of ignorance also that has already arisen is removed. These are the factors which are not considered attentively [by an ignorant worldling] though they should be considered.

"Because such a person considers attentively the factors which should not be considered and does not consider attentively the factors which should be considered, there arise in him āsavas that have not yet arisen and there increase in him āsavas that have already arisen.

18. "That person considers improperly thus: 'Did I exist in the past? Did I not exist in the past? Who was I in the past? How was I in the past?[15] In the past, who had been I and who was I [in the subsequent existence]? Will I exist in the future? Will I not exist in the future? Who will I be in the future? How will I be in the future? In the future, having been who, who will I be?'

"Also as regards the present, uncertainty arises in him thus: 'Do I exist? Do I not exist? Who am I? How am I ? From where has this soul come? Where will this soul go?'

19. "In a person who thus considers improperly there arises one of the six [wrong] views. The view 'I have self'[16] arises in him really and firmly. Or, the view 'I have no self' arises in him really and firmly. Or, the view 'I perceive self through self' arises in him really and firmly. Or, the view 'I perceive non-self[17] through self' arises in him really and firmly. Or, the view 'I perceive self through non-self' arises in him really and firmly. Or, he has the view thus: 'That self of mine speaks, knows and experiences the results of wholesome and unwholesome actions.[18] That self of mine is permanent, stable, durable, incorruptible and will be eternal like all things permanent.'

"Bhikkhus! This wrong view is called a false belief, a jungle of false beliefs, a desert of false beliefs, a thorny spike of false beliefs, an agitation of false beliefs and a fetter of false beliefs. Bhikkhus! The ignorant worldling who is bound up with the fetter of false beliefs cannot escape rebirth, ageing, death, grief, lamentation, pain, distress and despair. I declare that he cannot escape dukkha.[19]

20. "Bhikkhus! The instructed ariya disciple, who sees the Ariyas, who is skilled in their dhammas and who is trained and disciplined in their dhammas, who sees the Virtuous, who is skilled in their dhammas, and who is trained and disciplined in their dhammas, knows the factors which should be considered attentively and the factors which should not be considered attentively. Discriminating the factors which should be considered attentively from the factors which should not be considered attentively, he does not consider attentively the factors which should not be considered and considers attentively the factors which should be considered.

"Bhikkhus! What are the factors which are not considered attentively as they should not be considered?

"Bhikkhus! In one who considers attentively certain factors [which should not be considered], there arises the defilement of sense-pleasure that has not yet arisen, and there also is an increase of the defilement of sense-pleasure that has already arisen; there arises the defilement of hankering after better existence that has not yet arisen, and there also is an increase of the defilement of hankering after better existence that has already arisen; there arises the defilement of ignorance that has not yet arisen, and there also is an increase of the defilement of ignorance that has already arisen. These are the factors which are not considered attentively [by the ariya disciple] as they should not be considered.

"What are the factors which are considered attentively as they should be considered?

"Bhikkhus! In one who considers attentively certain factors [which should be considered], there does not arise the defilement of sense-pleasure that has not yet arisen, and the defilement of sense-pleasure also that has already arisen is removed; there does not arise the defilement of hankering after better existence that has not yet arisen, and the defilement of hankering after better existence also that has already arisen is removed; there does not arise the defilement of ignorance that has not yet arisen, and the defilement of ignorance also that has already arisen is removed. These are the factors which are considered attentively [by the ariya disciple] as they should be considered.

"Because such a person does not consider attentively the factors which should not be considered and considers attentively the factors which should be considered, there do not arise in him āsavas that have not yet arisen and the āsavas that have already arisen disappear.

21. "He considers properly: 'This is dukkha; this is the cause of dukkha; this is the cessation of dukkha; this is the practice leading to cessation of dukkha.' In him who thus considers properly, the following three fetters disappear, namely, the illusion of Self,[20] uncertainty[21] and belief in the efficacy of mere rites and rituals.[22] These are called the āsavas which should be removed through vision.

Āsavas that should be removed through restraint

22. "Bhikkhus! What are the āsavas that should be removed through restraint?[23]

"Bhikkhus! In this Teaching[24] the bhikkhu, reflecting properly, abides in the restraint of his faculty of sight. Āsavas and other destructive and burning defilements may arise in the bhikkhu who does not abide in the restraint of his faculty of sight with proper reflection. Those āsavas and other destructive and burning defilements do not arise in the bhikkhu who abides in the restraint of his faculty of sight[25] with proper reflection. Reflecting properly, the bhikkhu abides in the restraint of his faculty of hearing... abides in the restraint of his faculty of smell... abides in the restraint of his faculty of taste... abides in the restraint of his faculty of touch... abides in the restraint of his faculty of thought. Āsavas and other destructive and burning defilements may arise in the bhikkhu who does not abide in the restraint of his faculty of thought with proper reflection. Those āsavas and

other destructive and burning defilements do not arise in the bhikkhu who abides in the restraint of his faculty of thought with proper reflection.

"Bhikkhus! Āsavas and other destructive and burning defilements may arise in the bhikkhu who does not abide in the restraint of his faculties with proper reflection. Those āsavas and other destructive and burning defilements do not arise in the bhikkhu who abides in the restraint of his faculties with proper reflection. Bhikkhus! These are called the āsavas that are to be removed through restraint.

Āsavas that should be removed through proper use [of requisites].

23. "Bhikkhus! What are the āsavas that are to be removed through proper use?[26]

"Bhikkhus! In this Teaching, the bhikkhu wears the robes reflecting properly. He wears the robes only for protection from cold, heat, gadflies, mosquitoes, wind, heat of the sun, snakes, scorpions and lice, and just to cover up his nakedness.

"Reflecting properly, he takes alms-food. He does so not for enjoyment, not for vanity, not for improvement of the body, not for a better complexion, but only to sustain the physical body, to have just enough nourishment for maintaining life, to appease hunger and to carry out the Noble Practice of Purity. [He reflects thus:] 'By this alms-food, I shall remove the existing discomfort[27] and shall prevent the arising of new discomfort.[28] I shall have just enough nourishment to maintain life and to lead a blameless life with good health.'

"Reflecting properly, he makes use of his monastic living place. He does so only for protection from cold, heat, gadflies, mosquitoes, wind, heat of the sun, snakes, scorpions and lice, and inclement weather, and for the purpose of solitary seclusion.

"Reflecting properly, he makes use of medicines and medicinal requisites for curing illness. He uses them only to remove oppressive ailments that arise and only to be completely free from [further] ailment.

"Bhikkhus! Āsavas and other destructive and burning defilements may arise in the bhikkhu who does not use the four requisites with proper reflection. Those āsavas and other destructive and burning defilements do not arise in the bhikkhu who makes use of the four requisites with proper reflection. Bhikkhus! These are called the āsavas that are to be removed through proper use.

Āsavas that should be removed through forbearance

24. "Bhikkhus! What are the āsavas that are to be removed through forbearance?

"Bhikkhus! In this Teaching, the bhikkhu, reflecting properly, can endure cold, heat, hunger, thirst, gadflies, mosquitoes, wind, heat of the sun, snakes, scorpions and lice. He can endure ill-spoken and unwholesome words. He has the nature of being able to endure severe, cruel, excruciatingly sharp, disagreeable, unpleasant, deadly and painful

sensations which arise in the body.

"Bhikkhus! Āsavas and other destructive and burning defilements may arise in the bhikkhu who cannot endure such painful sensations. Those āsavas and other destructive and burning defilements do not arise in the bhikkhu who endures such painful sensations with proper reflection. Bhikkhus! These are called the āsavas that are to be removed through forbearance.

Āsavas that should be removed through avoidance

25. "Bhikkhus! What are the āsavas that are to be removed through avoidance?

"Bhikkhus! In this Teaching, the bhikkhu, reflecting properly, avoids a fierce elephant, a fierce horse, a fierce ox, a fierce dog, a snake, a tree-stump, a thorny place, an abyss, a precipice, a refuse-pit and a cesspool. If a bhikkhu dwells in such an improper place, resorts to such an improper resort and keeps company with evil friends, his wise fellow-bhikkhus would suspect him of involving himself in evil circumstances. Reflecting properly, he avoids improper places, improper resorts and evil friends.

"Bhikkhus! Āsavas and other destructive and burning defilements may arise in the bhikkhu who does not avoid such improprieties with proper reflection. Those āsavas and other destructive and burning defilements do not arise in the bhikkhu who avoids such improprieties with proper reflection. Bhikkhus! These are called the āsavas that are to be removed through avoidance.

Āsavas that should be removed through rejection

26. "Bhikkhus! What are the āsavas that are to be removed through rejection[29]?

"Bhikkhus! In this Teaching, the bhikkhu, reflecting properly, does not tolerate, but forsakes, rejects, gets rid of and prevents the repeated arising in him of the arisen sensual thoughts[30]... the arisen thoughts of malice[31]... the arisen thoughts of injuring another;[32] does not tolerate, but forsakes, rejects, gets rid of and prevents the repeated arising in him of evil and demeritorious thoughts whenever they arise.

"Bhikkhus! Āsavas and other destructive and burning defilements may arise in the bhikkhu who does not reject such demeritorious thoughts with proper reflection. Those āsavas and other destructive and burning defilements do not arise in the bhikkhu who rejects such demeritorious thoughts with proper reflection. Bhikkhus! These are called the āsavas that are to be removed through rejection.

Āsavas that should be removed through cultivation [of the Factors of Enlightenment]

27. "Bhikkhus! What are the āsavas that are to be removed through cultivation?

"Bhikkhus! In this Teaching, the bhikkhu, reflecting properly, cultivates the enlightenment-factor of mindfulness[33] that is directed to detachment[34] from defilements, freedom from attachment,[35] cessation[36] of defilements, and that promotes and develops the uprooting of defilements and speedy attainment of Nibbāna.[37]

"Reflecting properly, he cultivates the enlightenment-factor of investigative knowledge of phenomena[38]... cultivates the enlightenment-factor of effort[39]... cultivates the enlightenment-factor of delightful satisfaction[40]... cultivates the enlightenment-factor of serenity[41]... cultivates the enlightenment-factor of concentration[42]... he cultivates the enlightenment-factor of equanimity[43] that is directed to detachment from defilements, freedom from attachment, cessation of defilements, and that promotes and develops the uprooting of defilements and speedy attainment of Nibbāna.[44]

"Bhikkhus! Āsavas and other destructive and burning defilements may arise in the bhikkhu who does not cultivate these Seven Factors of Enlightenment. Those āsavas and other destructive and burning defilements do not arise in the bhikkhu who cultivates them with proper reflection. Bhikkhus! These are called the āsavas that are to be removed through cultivation.

28. "Bhikkhus! If a bhikkhu, has removed through vision the āsavas that should be removed through vision, has removed through restraint the āsavas that should be removed through restraint, has removed through proper use of requisites the āsavas that should be removed through proper use of requisites, has removed through forbearance the āsavas that should be removed through forbearance, has removed through avoidance the āsavas that should be removed through avoidance, has removed through rejection the āsavas that should be removed through rejection, has removed through cultivation the āsavas that should be removed through cultivation, he is said to be one who abides in the restraint of all āsavas. He has cut off craving, shaken off fetters and having become fully aware of [the nature of] self-conceit,[45] has made an end of dukkha."

Thus the Bhagavā said. Delighted, the bhikkhus rejoiced at the words of the Bhagavā.

Notes

1.

Bhagāva: "Exalted One".

2.

Āsavas: defilements that befuddle the mind: They are like liquor long fermented. They convey the idea of something flowing out that intoxicates or befuddles the mind. Āsavas are usually classified into four categories: (I) kāmāsava or gross attachment to and craving for the five sense-objects; (II) bhavāsava or craving for better existence, such as the rūpa and arūpa planes of existence in the belief that they are permanent, stable and constant;

this craving occurs together with sassata diṭṭhi (belief in eternalism); (III) avijjāsava or the defilement of lack of comprehension of the Four Ariya Truths through Magga Insight; (IV) diṭṭhāsava or the defilement that is false belief.

In this Sutta, however, the last is not mentioned. It may be taken as part of bhavāsava.

Although the āsavas are variously classified, they are basically only lobha (greed, desire), diṭṭhi (false belief) and moha (ignorance or bewilderment).

3.

By "one who knows and sees" is meant one who knows and sees with right perception of phenomena. With the use of this expression and on the basis of what is meant by knowing and seeing, the Buddha refers to the person (who knows and sees). This Sutta is a discourse taught with reference to the person and not the dhamma. [What is briefly said in this paragraph (¶15) is that the one who knows and sees with right perception of phenomena is able to rid himself of the āsavas while the āsavas proliferate, for the one who does not know and see with right perception of phenomena.]

4.

Right perception of phenomena: yonisomanasikāra: lit., proper attention; proper consideration. Right perception of phenomena means perceiving all phenomena as impermanent, unpleasurable soulless and unpleasant.

5.

Vision: i.e., perception of Nibbāna by means of Sotāpatti magga.

6.

"The ignorant worldling" means one who has not studied, who has not enquired into and who has not conned the Pāḷi scriptures concerning khandha, āyatana etc., and who has not achieved through practice the dhammas that he should achieve.

7.

Who is not in the habit of seeing: What is meant here is seeing by means of the eye of wisdom and not seeing by means of the physical or by means of the divine eye (dibbacakkhu).

8.

The Buddha, Paccekabuddhas, and the Disciples of the Buddha who have attained one of the four maggas are termed Ariyas.

9.

Who is not trained and disciplined: one who has not yet been disciplined in the five kinds of restraint, who has not yet been taught and who has not yet cultivated the five kinds of removal of the defilements and who has not yet removed the defilements.

10.

By "the Virtuous" (Sappurisa) is meant the Buddha, Paccekabuddhas and the Ariya Disciples of the Buddha.

11.

Factors: i.e., dhammas.

12.

Kāmāsava: the defilement of sense-pleasure; a gross attachment to and craving for the five sense-objects.

13.

Bhavāsava: the defilement of hankering after better existence; craving for rūpa and arūpa planes of existence in the belief that they are permanent, stable and constant. This craving occurs together with sassata diṭṭhi (belief in eternalism);

14.

Avijjāsava: the defilement of ignorance; the defilement of ignorance (of the Four Ariya Truths).

15.

I.e., of what appearance.

16.

Atta: self.

17.

Anattā: non-self.

18.

I.e., in terms of birth, destination, and plane of beings.

19.

Both these paragraphs (¶¶18-19) teach at length the attending to of those dhammas which are not worthy of attention and the arising of the 16 kinds of uncertainty (vicikicchā) and of the 6 kinds of atta-diṭṭhi.

20.

Sakkāyadiṭṭhi: illusion of Self in regard to the manifestation of one's khandhas or aggregates, as: "This is mine", "This is I", and "This is my Self".

21.

Vicikiccā: uncertainty concerning the Buddha, etc.

22.

Sīlabbataparāmāsa: belief in the efficacy of mere rites and rituals as practiced outside the Ariya Path.

23.

Restraint of the sense-faculties; saṃvara: the prevention through mindfulness of the arising of āsavas.

24.

Sāsana: Teaching (i.e., the Dhamma)

25.

Faculty of sight: lit, eye-faculty; so with the other sense-faculties.

26.

Proper use: using four requisites of a bhikkhu with due reflection. What is taught here is the mode of using the four requisites in such a manner that the arising of the āsavas is inhibited.

27.

Existing (lit., "old") discomfort: i.e., hunger.

28.

New discomfort: i.e., discomfort from immoderate eating.

29.

Rejection: vinodana: dispelling with effort such arising thoughts (vitakkas) as kāmavittaka. It does not mean total eradication through magga.

30.

Sensual thoughts: kāmavittaka.

31.

Thoughts of malice: byāpādavittaka.

32.

Thoughts of injuring another: vihiṃsāvittaka.

33.

Enlightenment-factor of mindfulness: sati sambojjhaṅga.

34.

Detachment: viveka.

35.

Freedom from attachment: virāga.

36.

Cessation: nirodha.

37.

vossagga.

38.

dhammavicaya sambojjhaṅga.

39.

vīriya sambojjhaṅga.

40.

pīti sambojjhaṅga.

41.

passaddhi sambojjhaṅga.

42.

samādhi sambojjhaṅga.

43.

upekkhā sambojjhaṅga.

44.

The most crucial point in ¶27 is the practice of the four Satipaṭṭhānas. It is the one and only way for the attainment of maggas and phalas and also for the realization of Nibbāna. As a matter of fact, the Seven Bojjhaṅgas cannot take place without the practice of the four Satipaṭṭhānas.

When a yogī practices the Satipaṭṭhānas, he will achieve, first of all, mental concentration. When it becomes sufficiently strong, he will achieve, stage by stage, thirteen vipassanā ñāṇas (insights), which will enable him to perceive the true nature of mind and body before he achieves maggas.

Bojjhaṅgas are the factors of enlightenment which one must have while he is passing through these thirteen vipassanā ñāṇas.

Sati means mindfulness. Dhammavicaya means mindfulness of nāma (mind) and rūpa (body) and their appearance and disappearance. Vīriya means diligence. Pīti means the emotion of joy. Passadhi means composure. Samādhi means mental concentration. Upekkhā means equanimity.

Briefly speaking, in the course of the practice of the Satipaṭṭhānas, if one knows he has the bojjhaṅgas hen he has them and knows he does not have them hen they disappear, and if he knows why he has them when he has them and why he does not have them when he has lost them, he is deemed to be a person who is endowed with these seven factors of enlightenment. And the Buddha taught that such a person is one who will pass through the vipassanā ñāṇas and achieve maggas speedily.

45.

Self-conceit: māna.

See also: AN 4.24; AN 5.140.